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THE INTERNATIONAL VERNACULAR

THE conception of art solely as a means of recording facts has so held the popular mind that another and more vital function often fails to receive the attention it deserves. This function under the present international conditions assumes an importance that cannot much longer be overlooked. It relates to the less obvious but more poignant message of a work of art. The man who paints, paints first of all himself. His subject is only the peg upon which his message hangs, but the message (if we can but read it) though less objective is more human, though less informing is invariably more revealing, than the subject is. Contact with a single original Greek sculpture of the Pheidian period (headless and armless though it be) gives an instant *sense* of Greek character which the whole literature of the epoch withholds. It is the next thing to personal association with the ancient Greeks themselves. It furnishes something akin to the inflection which colors speech, to the hesitation which subtly punctuates expression, to the smile which illuminates conversation—and it carries along its constant little “entre nous” as a running accompaniment to the theme it celebrates, and yet so distinct from the theme that many a work comes to be loved in spite of, rather than because of, its obvious subject. The anticipation and the quick understanding of these incidentals of expression, whether in art or in personal relations, constitute the technique (if we may so term it) of friendly association.

The allied countries, the French in

particular, have sent to the United States during the past year a number of exhibitions well devised to further such an intimacy on an international scale. The exhibition of French toys organized especially for the Art Institute, and unfortunately not available elsewhere, was one of these. It was in an intimate and surprising way a revelation of the French mood, and its success was an unmistakable indication of our American response to that which throbs in the bosom of France. The exhibition of the Sky Fighters brought a distinct surprise by almost doubling the Institute's usual July attendance. It remained for the collection of drawings by mobilized artists of France, in certain aspects the most intense and intimate of all the war exhibitions, to show that the public's appreciation was only beginning. This exhibition was scheduled for the first two weeks of September, a season in which the Art Institute attendance is usually regarded as being at an ebb, and yet in two days of its first week it brought into the Institute *one hundred and three thousand visitors*—more than one-tenth of the total attendance of the best year in the Institute's history! This circumstance demonstrates the gratifying fact that the public, in a country not usually regarded as superlative in its appreciation, is capable of reading in works of art a message on the realities of life. We are a people of few tongues; but there is evidence in the interest shown in these exhibitions that we shall not be permanently deaf to the great international vernacular of art.